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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/WE, EUR/RPM AND SCA/A

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [BE](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: BELGIAN MFA VIEWS ON FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. STATE 159623

[1](#)B. STATE 159959

[1](#)C. STATE 188868

Classified By: Acting DCM Richard Eason, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: CIA manager for South Asian analysis William Richardson met on March 3 with Christian Tanghe, Director for Asia, and Alain Hanssen, Director for South Asia, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Belgian officials expressed concern about the role played by Pakistan in the conflict in Afghanistan. They saw some hope for the future in the appointment of a new Interior Minister and Agriculture Minister in the Afghan government. They view the Belgian military as "overstretched" in Afghanistan, but said that the GOB is nevertheless discussing ways to expand its military and development assistance to the country. While the MFA would like for Belgium to contribute police trainers to the EU's EUPOL training mission to Afghanistan, it has yet to overcome resistance of the Ministry of Interior to the idea. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Embassy Poloff delivered the information contained in the three reftel demarches to Hanssen and Tanghe. Following that, Richardson gave the two MFA officials a description of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan as seen by the USG and the difficulties that the USG and ISAF are facing in controlling the Taliban. He discussed the role played by Pakistan as a place of refuge for Taliban and Al Q'aida fighters. Hanssen agreed that Pakistan's actions are key to the situation in Afghanistan. However, he noted, Pakistani President Zardari is adept at using the right words to describe his intentions, but his actions show how little influence he actually has. In fact, he commented that Pakistan seems to believe it needs the Taliban to get resources from the United States that would dry up if the Taliban were beaten. He also agreed with Richardson that most Pakistanis living outside areas bordering Afghanistan are not supporting Islamic radicals. He said that according to information he has received, attacks on Taliban bases in Fatah have succeeded in eliminating several key leaders. Nevertheless, he said, they seem to be easily replaced.

[1](#)3. (C) Hanssen described the new Interior Minister Atmar as dynamic, and expressed hope that the new Minister of Agriculture will be able to make progress. These officials are "good news", he said. Agricultural improvements are important, in Hanssens' opinion, since they are key to both the population's welfare and to eradicating opium poppy production. Things could be worse, he mused, in that the country could break up like Somalia. At least there is some central government influence in Afghanistan, he concluded. Hanssen sees President Karzai as determined to hold on to his office at all costs. However, he believes some credible candidates for President exist, in the person of Mohammed Noor and some others. He hopes they will participate in the elections this year. Hanssen said he had heard that the U.S. Embassy in Kabul is promoting the idea of a "team" of leaders, and he welcomed such creativity in thinking. Afghan

leaders need to be convinced to make a coalition for their country and cease playing individual games, he said. At the same time, we must be careful not to be seen as supporting one or more candidates over others, but rather only democracy, he concluded.

14. (C) Hanssen described the Belgian military as "overstretched" by its commitments to Afghanistan, Africa, Kosovo and Lebanon. Sixty percent of the military budget is concentrated on Afghanistan operations, he said, and it will be difficult to do more. He insisted that Belgium must be modest about its goals in Afghanistan, and could not be expected to play a central role in reforming the country by itself.

15. (C) Hanssen explained that Belgium provides direct bilateral development assistance to 18 "partner countries", not including Afghanistan. In other countries, such as Afghanistan, assistance is provided through NGO's and UN agencies. NGO's receiving Belgian financial support and active in Afghanistan include the Asia Foundation, the Agha Khan foundation and others. UN agencies include UNHCR, the World Food Program, the UN Development Fund for Women and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. In 2008 the GOB provided a total of about 8 million euros for Afghanistan relief and development. Hanssen repeated what we have been told by other Belgian officials, that the Belgian parliament names "partner countries". (Note: the text of the Law on Belgian International Cooperation of 25 May 1999 is somewhat different; it says "Belgian International Cooperation shall undertake direct bilateral cooperation in a maximum of 25 countries or regional organisations of countries...selected

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by Royal decree debated within the Council of Ministers.") Hanssen said that the GOB is looking at ways to increase its assistance to Afghanistan, both for security and for development.

16. (C) Hanssen said that Belgium is not currently contributing to EUPOL, the EU-led training mission in Afghanistan. The GOB, and particularly the Ministry of Interior, are reluctant to send a lot of police abroad, he said, adding "we don't have expeditionary police". However, he said, the MFA has been trying to get the MOI to drop its objections to participation in EUPOL for some time now without success.

17. (C) Hanssen asked Richardson whether India could be persuaded to let up pressure on Kashmir so that Pakistan can concentrate on the real dangers along its border with Afghanistan. Richardson said that India is comfortable with developments in Kashmir, having seen a big turnout for recent elections and experiencing success in its counter-insurgency efforts. The Indians feel time is on their side, he said, and they don't feel pressured to negotiate with Pakistan. Hanssen said that he finds the home-grown insurgency in Kashmir new and worrisome.

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